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Playing Soldiers: Posing Militarism in the Domestic Sphere

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## CHAPTER SIX

### PLAYING SOLDIERS: POSING MILITARISM IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

GIL PASTERNAK

While looking through the collection of family photographs of the Blum family, I came across a black and white photographic portrait of Avi Blum taken in 1967 (Fig. 6-1). A stamp on the back of the photograph indicates it was produced by *Ha'Shachar* photography studio in the *Nahalat Binyamin* neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. Avi is located against a “neutral” grey background, wearing the light grey-coloured uniform of the Israeli Air Force and the regulation beret. With a grin on his face, Avi’s eyes are steadfastly fixed on a spot outside the photograph, invisible and unknown to us the viewers. The Blum family is part of my extended family, and the photograph I refer to is one of many showing different members of the family in uniform as well as others, taken on family events, trips, and holidays in Israel and abroad. While the sitter is recognizable and familiar to viewers within the family sphere, his appearance in military costume signifies his association with an order beyond the institution of the family. The uniform, coupled with its attached insignia, link the sitter with symbols of state power, coding him as an agent of that power. Yet it also marks the sitter as subject to the authority of the state, symbolically placing him in a position of subjection to its rule and order, solemnising him as a subject at the service of the state of Israel and not just an ordinary civilian.<sup>1</sup>

In line with Roland Barthes’ reflections on fashion and costume (1990), the military uniform locates the figure in a particular historical period, connecting the sitter with a specific community and set of social values (see also, Carter 2003). Through the employment of these very minimal yet symbolic representative means, coupled with the high definition of the photograph and the absorbed pose assumed by the sitter,

the portrait signifies formality, marking out the figure as an Israeli soldier—a social figure.



Fig. 6-1: Photographer Unknown. 1967. *Untitled (Avi Blum)*. The Blum collection of family photographs, 1949-2006.

The form and format of this representation demonstrates how photo-portraiture in general is instrumental in identity work. In using the term “photo-portraiture” or “photo-portrait” I refer to photographs showing a person or a group of people captured while presenting themselves for the camera or, arguably, a beholder. I choose to use this terminology because showing oneself through visual representation is not something unique to the medium of photography. In fact, it is a form of representation historically derived from and embedded within painterly traditions; it is a form of representation alluding to the formal painted portrait, and legible as such through the viewers’ familiarity with styles, poses and modes of composition that have been employed by painters for the same purpose (Trachtenberg 1992).

Culturally, portraiture has been broadly apprehended as a visual reflection of identity, social role and position (Berger 2000). More significantly, however, it has been taken that the sitter’s pose reflects a self-conscious identification with the position occupied in their picture. That is, not only in terms of appearance, but also in terms of the

ideological and moral stance associated with the range of conventional poses and their culturally perceived set of meanings. This seems more troubling when one considers the relationship between the genre and conventions of portraiture when applied to the medium of photography. It is noted by John Tagg, for example, that the photo-portrait is “a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity” (1988, 37). Thanks to the medium’s putative veracity, photographic portraiture delivers the act of posing as an indexical sign, prompting viewers to understand it as a visual likeness and a reliable image of the original. Considering specifically photographic portraits, the fact that they are thought of as representations of subjects who exist, or have existed, and that the pose they adopt had actually to have been assumed by them, “there-then”, probably contributes to linking and confusing momentary depictions with fixed social positions and identities.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking about the portrait in photography, Graham Clarke explains that, in Occidental cultures, the photographic portrait enjoys the status of a signature, as if declaring itself as an authentic presence or trace of the individual seen in the picture. However, Clarke also argues that:

The photograph displaces, rather than represents, the individual. It codifies the person in relation to other frames of reference and other hierarchies of significance. Thus, more than any other kind of photographic image, the portrait achieves meaning through the context in which it is seen. (1992, 1)

The sense of authenticity often associated with the photographic image can be considered ever more powerful when the photograph is located within the family album. After all, such photographs show subjects familiar to the viewing family members or, at least, people believed to have been associated with their intimate realm, and the legacy of the family.

Photographs of family members dressed in uniform are not exceptional. Their situation in the family album appears to be an integral part of the practice and apparatus of family photography. The insertion of such depictions into the family album is not something unique to Israeli people and societies. Pierre Bourdieu (1990), for instance, locates photographic portraits of soldiers among other categories that, according to him, appear in family albums as representational agencies constructing associations between sitters and the actual human environments within which they live. Bourdieu perceives the desire to display such photographs as an aspiration to indicate the integration of the family into the social realm, its participation and contribution to social life, and its desire to maintain the social order. However, without intending to oppose this view, it needs to

be acknowledged that, since the Israeli army was only established with the modern state of Israel in 1948, the depiction of sitters wearing the uniform of the IDF could not possibly have existed prior to that moment. In addition, since to a large degree Jewish people in the Diaspora had been deprived of occupying any authoritative social positions, the production of images of modern Jews in modern military uniform signifies more than mere participation in the Israeli social sphere.

Along with Gypsies and homosexuals, in the nineteenth-century, Daniel Boyarin argues (1997), the body of the Jew was commonly portrayed as unhealthy and abnormal. Complementing this argument, Sander Gilman argues that Jewish men in the Diaspora were often represented as emasculated, feminine men (1991). Nineteenth-century European texts described the body of the Jewish man as weak, bent and misshapen. Some texts even claimed that the Jewish man experienced a menstrual cycle. Jewish women were not excluded from such derogatory depictions, but their image was moulded differently to that of Jewish men. Gilman (1993) as well as Tamar Garb (1995) show that, during the same period, as well as at the turn of the twentieth-century, the category of the Jewess as a racist classification gradually came to being. Accordingly, Jewish women were often perceived to be inherently different from Jewish men but, in addition, they were also described as different from the constructed ideal of modern European reserved femininity. Jewish women were conceived of as a repository of beauty and sensuality. The image of the Jewess was constructed in conformity with the fantasy of the Oriental woman: a woman that matures earlier than the European woman, a hot-blooded, lively woman. In the early twentieth-century, however, the Jewess was often understood as the embodiment of not only intensive, but also destructive sexuality: she was perceived as a woman burning with sexual desire. Overly sensual and seductive, she was often seen as the ultimate embodiment of the *femme fatale*.

In order to negate such an attitude towards the body of the Jew, that of the male Jew in particular, it was one of the primary goals of the Zionist movement to “cure” this identity by portraying masculinity as an ideal model for emulation (Shapira 1989). This resulted in the emergence of a new Jewish identity that surmounted both the racist image of the Diaspora Jew as well as that of the Jewess. This new identity was manifested in the figure of the Jewish pioneer that, in the years leading up to the inception of the Israeli state, was modified and took the shape of the Jewish combatant. Martial masculinity served as a symbol of strength and national rejuvenation, and to a large extent weakened perceived sexual and gender differences (Almog 2000; Biale 1997; Weiss 2002; Zerubavel 2002). In

the light of this, the establishment and maintenance of an Israeli army, coupled with the inclination of Israel to emphasise and demonstrate the militant competence and professionalism of its soldiers, should not be perceived only as a response to the precarious existence of the Israelis in their own state. It is also a reaction to the image of the Diaspora's emasculated Jew to whom fighting was anathema.<sup>3</sup>

## Israeli Society and its Attitude to Soldierly

One of the most prominent figures in the Israeli human landscape is the soldier. If the Palestinian is the ultimate *other* of modern Israeli society—a figure representing an internal opposition to the existence of the Israeli state as well as inferior social standards and cultural customs—then the Israeli soldier is its counterpart. The image of the combatant is an object for identification and emulation deeply embedded in Israeli society. Thus, it is only reasonable to assume that identification with the idealised military image along with admiration for its associated characteristics and symbols should permeate the practice of family photography.

The properties of the desirable, ideal image of Israeli soldiery are associated with the image of the combatant. This constructed fantasy is of a male, masculine soldier. It portrays the figure of the combatant as a soldier who maintains a high capacity of emotional and physical self-restraint, always prepared to take up difficult, complex tasks and, in particular, dangerous missions involving an actual risk to life. Jewish-Israelis, *men and women*, of all ethnic backgrounds and social status hold this image in high esteem, perceiving it as the ultimate manifestation of masculine hegemony, as well as that of “good citizenship” (Sasson-Levy 2006).

In this chapter I focus on photographs that I have extracted from my own family albums as well as from those of my extended family. These all include a good portion of photographs of relatives taken at some point while they served in the IDF and I use them here as case studies. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Pasternak 2010), such photographs are representative of customary photographic practices of the vast majority of Jewish-Israeli families. I argue that in order to learn about the importance Israeli society accords to serving in the IDF, as well as to understand why or how the image of the Israeli soldier has become so eminent, it is necessary to look into the historical and national meta-narratives that prevail within Israeli social life, and to consider social routines and normative practices.

Reuven Gal (1986) explains that, from a historical point of view, the state of Israel has been involved in social and political conflicts since the very early days of its establishment. These conflicts have become an integral part of the Israeli experience of life. Consequently, taking part in defence, security, military and paramilitary activities has always been associated with prominence and respect. But in addition to this historical aspect, the *collective memory* of the six million Jews extinguished by the Nazis has given birth to a common notion that the security of the Israeli state is also a guarantee that the Jews would enjoy their right to maintain their traditions and live according to their own social customs, that they would not be subjected to the rules of other communities and, above all, that they would not be persecuted again. While the IDF is highly regarded by Israeli society because of its perceived historical capability to protect the state and its inhabitants, as well as for its symbolic indication of the Jewish nation as one of a strong brave people, the vast majority of Israelis also respect it because of its perceived involvement in developing, advancing and building the nation. From its establishment, the IDF has participated in education programmes, and has assisted in the erection of new settlements, in the absorption and socialisation of new immigrants, as well as in the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents.

Perhaps from both of these historical and national perspectives, Israeli society appears to consider serving in the forces as the ultimate means of socialisation and attestation of national loyalty. Such a notion manifests itself through social practices that express appreciation of those who have completed their share, and disapproval towards those who have not (Gal 1986). But, beyond the social approach towards service in the Israeli army, a significant number of normative practices can be found within Israeli life itself. Folk songs, classic poems, teenagers' dress codes, colloquial speech and educated language conventionally pertain to military matters and style, idealising the image of the warrior Israeli soldier. Furthermore, the Israeli public education system is to an extent preoccupied with the preparation of Israeli youth towards their future obligatory military service, conferring a sense of collective responsibility and encouraging them to serve in the IDF willingly and courageously (Ben-Amos and Bet-El 2003; Drory 2005; Furman 1999; Schiff 1987).

Against this background, Israeli teenagers are obliged to join the IDF at the age of eighteen. Men are called for a period of three years, and unmarried women for two years. However, it should be emphasised that although in Israel serving in the IDF is a fact of life, not a matter of choice, and even though by the time they are enlisted conscripts understand their sense of duty and legal obligation, Israeli boys and girls eagerly anticipate

their military service. Joining the IDF is a social norm usually supported by Israeli society unequivocally, and is a criterion for normality, communal belonging, as well as an entitlement to enjoy full social and institutional rights (Berkovitz 1999; Helman 1997).

In view of the particular relationship between Israeli society and the IDF, it is probably not surprising that family albums in Israel feature a large number of photographs referring to military service. Apart from the fact that serving in the IDF is obligatory and thereby an integral part of the life of almost every Israeli, it is also one of the most fundamental experiences that contribute to shaping and demonstrating a sense of Israeli patriotism (Popper 2004).

### The Israeli Soldier in Family Photographs

Bearing in mind the particular historical and national, social and political circumstances prevailing in Israeli society, it could be claimed that more than any other family photo-portrait, it is that of the Israeli soldier that manifests the relationship and interrelationship between the family and the Israeli social realm, as well as between the family and the Israeli state. For me, one of the most telling examples is the earliest photograph in my family album that refers to the image of the Israeli soldier (Fig. 6-2).



Fig. 6-2: Photographer Unknown. 1950s. *Untitled*. Dorit Pasternak collection of family photographs, 1946-1971.



This photograph was produced in the mid 1950s, showing an anonymous child in soldier's uniform, saluting and smiling for the camera within a domestic environment. A vigilant spectator would notice that the uniform is not of the IDF's typical kind. In the early years of the Israeli state the IDF still did not have a set of standard uniforms.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a sense of identification of the child with the Israeli soldier is expressed by the shape of the rank badges attached to his uniform and by the badge decorating the front of his hat, which is the symbol of the modern Israeli army. It is obvious that the child is only pretending to be a military man; he is enacting someone's fantasy: either his own, his parents, or that of the person who took the photograph. The photograph portrays the child as if he himself were mentally immersed in the spirit of militarism and military order, military manners and organisation. While this may well be the case, the photograph cannot possibly aver that. Although unavoidably, it allows some of the core foundations of military manners to infiltrate into the private space of familial identity-work, binding the figure it depicts to a particular region, history and ideology, and opening it up to a circumstantial political reading, the image primarily alludes to the photographic event itself.

It is through the assumption of this particular prefabricated and already culturally interpreted pose of military etiquette, combined with the recognisable insignia, that the photograph communicates the idea of total devotion to the IDF, obedience to its values, and a sense of admiration for its soldiers. The smile on the child's face, his direct gaze and satisfied expression, as well as the pleasure he appears to have taken in the salute, constitute an image of unproblematic identification with the subject-position connoted by the uniform. Located on a decorative patterned floor, in front of a large wooden wardrobe, next to a radio and a night lamp, the child plays soldier in a safe context, thereby domesticating militarism and its modes of signification.

This sheds light on the way the practice of family photography joins other social practices and apparatuses that operate to prescribe and perpetuate the customary, the acceptable and the standard. The situation recorded by the camera represents a moment at which the child earned approval (C.f., Brim and Wheeler 1966, 12). After all, family photography is a normative practice, and family photographs are often records of the family's compatibility with social conventions and customs (Chalfen 1987). Through the practice of family photography the family organises itself in front of the camera as a social unit, commonly leading each one of its members to assume and present his or her familial, social or desired position. Furthermore, it is through family photographs that the alleged

status and routine activities of the family manifest themselves as something fixed and everlasting, characteristic and standard.

### *Changing Positions: Miriam (Miri) Tamir*

Going through the family photographs of the Tamir family, I discovered a whole album solely dedicated to depicting the conscription of Miriam (Miri) Tamir. The vast majority of the pictures in this album were taken between January and April 1967, corresponding to the day Miri reported to the local recruiting centre on 23 January 1967, and the following period of basic training and unit allocation. As a consequence, the album narrates the transformation of Miri into an IDF soldier. Although a great portion of Miri's photo-portraits in this album were produced by a professional photographer, none of them was taken to serve the formal needs of the IDF. The production of these photographs was offered as a service to the fresh conscripts to enable them to obtain visual records of their early days in uniforms.<sup>5</sup> Photographing within IDF military camps is a practice formally forbidden by the military establishments.<sup>6</sup> To this day, only authorised persons are allowed to take pictures within the military environment, and this restriction extends to soldiers. It is, therefore, likely that the professional photographer who took the pictures directed the subjects to assume a set of specific, quite conventional poses, or at the very least inspired them by his guidance.



Fig. 6-3: Photographer Unknown. 17.02.1967. *Untitled (Miri Tamir)*. Miri (Miriam) Tamir family album, 1967.

One of these photographs shows Miri by a tree trunk, laying her hands on it in a manner reminiscent of poses acted out for fashion photography (Fig. 6-3). She stares at a spot outside the picture with a self-consciously posed smile on her face, thus suggesting that what we as spectators look at is a scene taken after Miri was set up to be portrayed and observed. While the uniform signifies the figure's subjection to military rule and hierarchy, in the collection of these photographs we encounter a paradox: the particular Khaki uniform of the IDF is supposed to express simplicity, modesty, and altruistic idealism (Almog 2000). Upon its introduction, it was meant to function as a marker of the common identity and faith of those who wore it; it was intended to make them all appear indistinguishable from one another, and to symbolise the superior moral position of society over the individual. Since the establishment of the IDF, self-effacement has been understood as a reflection of the purity and modesty of the soldier, also attesting to their heroic spirit, military competence as well as to their adherence to altruistic values. The genre and representational conventions of portraiture appear to dissent from these values, operating to create the illusion of an independent individual (Berger 2000; Tagg 1988). While any portrait indicates either the desired or true position of the subject within his or her society, at the centre of it is the individual subject. Historically, the photographic portrait was encouraged by the nineteenth-century ideology of the charismatic individual and celebrity. Its representational conventions primarily intended to emphasise the sitters' individualism (Cardinal 1992). Much portraiture, thus, appears to pertain to the eccentric, not the ascetic; to the self-absorbed, not the altruistic. As a record, Miri's portrait verifies that she has successfully completed the most prominent process of socialisation in Israeli culture. Conversely, it also embodies a refusal to abandon her personal desire to be seen as a soldier, a desire to exchange her actual temporary deeds with a fixed depiction by which her soldierly identity could be commemorated and admired.<sup>7</sup> The situation of the portrait in the family album only reinforces this notion. Not only does the photograph draw attention to a moment of conscious performativity, it is also designated a space for its display.

Apart from the artificial position of the figure by the tree, like in many other photographs in this album, the fact that her eyes are fixed on a point away from the camera, suggests that it was part of the set up. The fixation of the eyes on a spot outside the representational space is a conventional pose within the history of painting. Having been passed down to photo-portraiture, it assists the posing subject to appear otherwise engaged, and unaware of being observed (Berger 2000). By obscuring the eyes from the

observer, the subject appears as if he or she is unconscious of a beholder. This distancing pose implies an objective depiction of the person posing. In this respect, it is an idealised depiction, suggesting a desire of the subject to appear as an exemplar of themselves, as if they do not take an interest in displaying themselves to others.

Both the preoccupation with self-representation as well as the aspiration to proclaim affiliation with the IDF departs from the modest code of behaviour expected from its soldiers. By focusing on an individual person, Miri's photographs celebrate her, making the figure *seem* distinguishable, her identity exceptional. This is perhaps the reason such photographs have a place in a family album: they simultaneously celebrate the subjects' particularity as well as their adherence to a prominent social group.

Miri's series of photographs, however, is also inconsistent with the normative construction of martial femininity of the IDF female soldier. Israel is the only country in the world with compulsory conscription for women. The Zionist socialist ideology of sexual equality, coupled with the pre-state tradition in which women and men both engaged in military tasks, has generated an image of the female soldier as one fighting side by side with the armed male soldiers (Tydor Baumel 2002). Although contemporary research reveals that by the time the IDF was established it had already been decided by the Israeli High Command to forbid women from serving as combatants as well as in front-line assignments, the image of the female combatant remained alive for several decades (Rogoff 1999, 2000).

Miri's family photographs play out conventional notions of femininity. They are legible as depictions of a soldier only because of the uniform she wears. Otherwise, she appears rather enticing, even coquettish (Fig. 6-4 and 6-5). Sociological research of gender identity in the Israeli army asserts that the male combatant soldier represents the ideal model of Israeli soldiery because the combatant materialises the military organisation's aim-fighting (Sasson-Levy 2006). Due to this quality, the combatant also symbolises a necessary connection between masculinity and nationalism. Miri's pictures offer different implications: her poses, the orientation of her face, the smile and her stance are incompatible with typical representational conventions of martial masculinity. Instead, they allow conventional gender identities to enter the discourse, undermining the gender rhetoric of the army despite the military environment, and appearing to situate her in line with the image of the playful Jewess.



Fig. 6-4: Photographer Unknown. 17.02.1967. *Untitled (Miri Tamir)*. Miri (Miriam) Tamir family album, 1967.

Fig. 6-5: Photographer Unknown. 17.02.1967. *Untitled (Miri Tamir)*. Miri (Miriam) Tamir family album, 1967.

Miri is also photographed more appropriately according to the social circumstances described here. For example, two photographs show Miri dressed in the IDF's training uniform. One of these shows Miri carrying a rifle on her shoulder, standing still as if presenting herself for the camera (Fig. 6-6). In the other, she appears in a firing position, kneeling, supporting the rifle with both hands, pointing it towards something outside the visible representational space (Fig. 6-7). The first photograph is mainly informative: the sitter presents herself as a soldier; staring directly at the camera, she appears to declare consciousness of the significance of the photographic moment. As if to say the moment was right for the production of the portrait, and that she was captured while assuming a soldierly persona willingly and voluntarily. The second photograph, however, appears to be more like an interpretation of the previous one. Here, Miri utilises the moment to demonstrate, or at least denote a soldierly propensity. Turning her eyes away from the viewer, the figure comes across



Fig. 6-6: Photographer Unknown. 12.02.1967. *Untitled (Miri Tamir)*. Miri (Miriam) Tamir family album, 1967.



Fig. 6-7: Photographer Unknown. 12.02.1967. *Untitled (Miri Tamir)*. Miri (Miriam) Tamir family album, 1967.

as if denying the scenario, denying that she presents herself for a portrait, whereas in actual fact she is being portrayed at the same time as she poses. As opposed to the previous images where her eyes are also directed away from the beholder, here Miri appears to have a valid reason to ignore the viewer since she prepares to shoot and thereby needs to direct her full attention at the target.

And yet, while the figure appears to assume a firing position, she does not do so correctly. Her left hand is situated too far back from the rifle's supporting handle, her thumb is too high, thus disrupting the possibility of a clear view between the front and back sights of the rifle. While, technically, it is possible to operate the rifle this way, it is impossible accurately to engage a target, which is the reason one assumes the firing position in the first place. Furthermore, Miri's smile does not help to convince viewers that she actually intends to fire. The scenario seems incongruous; located away from a battlefield or a training environment, the figure takes on a firing position on a sidewalk by a shrubbery! While the former, more representative portrait of Miri, depicts a coherent scenario, showing her posing for the camera, wearing the IDF uniform, and being situated within the military environment of the camp, the latter photograph undermines this coherence, pointing to a fault line in the mode of representing martial virtues.

This is not to suggest that within the family album the two photographs cannot or do not function as sources of pride. Not only does their overwhelming presence within the album attest to this, it must also be noted that posing is itself a sign of normative behaviour: intending to appear in a social position is evidence of an aspiration towards compatibility with social norms and expectations. What I wish to demonstrate at this point is rather that, while the military-associated family photographs appear to establish soldierly identity within the family environment, to perpetuate the standard and indicate the compatibility of the family with such principles, often they appear inconsistent in content, their production for informal ends, conceptually conflicting with soldierly protocols. Such images challenge the broadly acceptable image of Israeli soldiery, thereby their perpetuation implies subversion. Nevertheless, these family photographs also manifest the immersion of the sitters in state ideology; performing as individuals, as if they were free to choose to serve the state, the sitters in fact proclaim their subjection to the ideological constraints of the state. On a representational level, these images subvert the normative mode of representing Israeli martial virtue. On an ideological level, however, through the production of such photographs

the subjects confirm their submission to the ruling ideology; the images manifest their successful political interpellation.

### *Failure of Conformism: Ephraim Pasternak*

Constructing and recording martial identity photographically for private ends may result in the deconstruction of the very identity family members desire to obtain and fix through the production of such photographs and their placement in the family album. An investigation into photographs of my father, Ephraim Pasternak, taken during his military duty and reserve service may solidify my argument that in Israel, the production and display of photographs of family members in uniform simultaneously perpetuates the identity of the family member as a soldier, but also undermines the official image of Israeli martial masculinity. It may appear to work to humanise the army, to domesticate military life, to dissociate the Israeli soldier from war, combat and violence. At the same time, however, it brings into being images that live in conflict with the Israeli state's visual propaganda.

Photographs in Ephraim's album show him in various contexts: as a baby, in kindergarten, at school, with friends and relations. If one examines these chronologically, it may seem as though the album is a site that puts on display the gradual formation of Ephraim's social identity as manifested by visual means.<sup>8</sup> However, the photographs do not appear sequentially. Instead of presenting a linear depiction of Ephraim's maturation, the album offers a mixture of inconsistent views from the various stages of this process. The eye-catching military photographs accompany the civil pictures from page to page repeatedly and systematically. For this reason, the subject of militarism becomes a leitmotiv.

The opening page of the album is most striking, where three class photographs from kindergarten and school are placed alongside a group photograph of my father's platoon in Basic Training (Fig. 6-8). This photograph also happens to be Ephraim's earliest photograph as a soldier (Fig. 6-9). The year is 1964, Ephraim appears among forty-eight freshly minted fellow soldiers, all dressed in identical uniforms, holding rifles. As seen already, family photographs and the family album in particular are representational spaces of compatibility with social norms (Chalfen 1987; Hirsch 1997). In fact, they also work as records, or at least manifestations of normality. Furthermore, they produce regularity, functioning as a normalising apparatus. They allow spectators to compare how family members perform roles in the social sphere in front of the camera, as well





Fig. 6-8: Photographer Unknown. *Untitled*. Ephraim Pasternak family album, 1949-1971.



Fig. 6-9: Photographer Unknown. 1964. *Untitled*. Ephraim Pasternak family album, 1949-1971.

as offering comparisons with those of other members of the same community (and beyond). When examining group portraits, comparisons of performance are unavoidable as the figures exist within the same space and thereby are viewed in direct relation to one another. This appears to be even more apparent when the portrait is of soldiers. The uniforms always-already allude to an expected unified and unifying code of behaviour.



Fig. 6-10: Photographer Unknown. 1964. *Untitled* (detail). Ephraim Pasternak family album, 1949-1971.

Even though at first sight in the portrait of my father and his platoon they all seem similar to one another and thereby also cohesive as a group, their fixed depiction reveals some subtle differences. The vast majority of the soldiers seem to be engaged by the presence of the camera and the photographic event. Most of the soldiers appear as if smiling at the viewer. Some of them bend down a little, looking as if they wish to ensure they appear within the view-range of the camera. One of them holds a cigarette in his mouth, another one is seen wearing sunglasses. A soldier on the right hand-side of the photograph oddly wears a flip-flop on his left foot. The way the soldiers handle their weapons seems uncertain, clumsy and careless, some of them even point their rifles negligently at others. It is a

photograph of a group of men appearing as if captured in a moment of informal sociability—"at ease". Perhaps portraying Israeli military experience in a positive light, as a pleasant social practice, it is nevertheless an ambiguous image: on the one hand, it makes the military environment appear like a pseudo-family network, informal and casual. On the other hand, the soldiers do not appear qualified and ready to go into combat as the image appears to repudiate the avowed values of Israeli soldiery as disseminated by the Israeli state.

An example of a much more conformist military identity can be found at the centre of the photograph where, identified by their insignia, the two training instructors of the new conscripts are located (Fig. 6-10). For the trainee soldier, the instructors are authoritative figures as well as models to emulate. Reading their performance in this photograph through this military position and role, their upright posture, deadpan expression, and tidy appearance conform more directly to the established mode of the representation of martial masculinity outlined above. Their self-restraint echoes both obedience and authority. Within the Israeli military environment, the soldier who lives up to embodying the image of such qualities would be perceived as thoughtful and responsible, as having a sense of enterprise and leadership, developed imagination and a high capacity to evaluate responsibly external conditions and situations—an ideal soldier (Ben-Ari 1998). Especially when the male soldier is at stake, internalising calm, impassive conduct not only makes the soldier exemplary in the eyes of his commanders and colleagues, it also affirms his masculinity, as in the military-influenced Israeli society, masculinity is associated with soldiery and heroism. While perhaps generating an *impression* of a conscious self-submission into ideological grouping, in Ephraim's group portrait the soldiers appear to compete with one another to win the attention of the viewer, as if they were aiming at indicating their difference from their fellows. Professionalism and esprit de corps are here presented as subordinate attributes.

One might assume that the ambiguous performance of the soldiers in this picture is due to the fact that it represents one of the very first moments at which they had to negotiate the way they wished to shape and present their newly obtained social role and position. A much later group photograph may demonstrate otherwise. The portrait I refer to was taken in 1967, shortly after the war of June 1967 (Fig. 6-11). All the figures appearing in the photograph are reservist, thereby experienced soldiers. Nevertheless, here too the poses these soldiers assume do not resonate with one another. Each one of them strikes a completely different pose resulting in a set of competing individual portraits.



Fig. 6-11: Photographer Unknown. 1967. *Untitled*. Ephraim Pasternak family album, 1949-1971.

My argument here does not hold that such images dissociate the sitters from military life, nor from the experience and ideology of militarism in general. Rather, I argue that such images produce and perpetuate ideas about serving in the IDF that are incompatible with narratives, topoi and images circulated through the acceptable official and cultural authorities of the Israeli state. Challenging, even damaging the asceticism, altruism and the notion of anonymity associated with the aura of the Israeli soldier, the two group portraits also injure his image as a heroic masculine figure. In George Mosse's discussion of the notion of masculinity in western social formations he claims that "the urge to serve in a cause higher than the individual, to put manliness in the service of an ideal, had ... been part of the definition of masculinity from the very beginning" (1996, 109). Complementing this viewpoint, David Gilmore argues that expendability

often constitutes the measure of manhood (1990). According to him, in order to be considered manly, male subjects need to demonstrate that they accept their expendability. Posing for a commemorative portrait for private ends, however, coupled with the plurality of enacted poses, both the early 1964 and the 1967 group portraits do not make the soldiers seem replaceable.

This is not to say that in reality the soldiers were not devoted to the group, to the IDF and the state of Israel, that they were not willing to sacrifice their lives for the defence of the Israeli people and state. Rather, what I suggest is that as a representation, as an image, their group portraits fail to manifest such devotion. They emphasise the informal—that which is off the record. At most, these group portraits appear as sites of social processing in which sitters are incorporated into a series of valued social identities: the photographs reproduce the social position and role of the sitters, removing them from the familial environment within which they are being looked at, and placing them in the pseudo-family social group of the battalion. This displacement acts to identify the sitter with the nation, its formal ideology and cause. Except that the remit of the genre of portraiture does not allow the sitters to appear wholly compliant with the doctrines their newly acquired social role implies.



Fig. 6-12: Photographer Unknown. 1965. *Untitled*. Ephraim Pasternak family album, 1949-1971.

Another photograph in Ephraim's album demonstrates how even when conforming with established norms of martial representation, adequately and repeatedly, spectators still face the problem of incompatibility with the IDF's ascetic protocols. This photograph was taken in 1965. It shows my father with one of his colleagues, striking a pose side by side in a military site (Fig. 6-12). Wearing helmets and dressed in similar uniforms, the two appear as if modelling their military accessories in an analogous manner. With their helmets' strips fastened around their heads, weapons in their hands, bullet-magazines and extra ammunition in place, the two soldiers emerge as comfortable in their motivated proud fighter look. Their performance is identical, making them appear as though they are ready for action, geared up and prepared to conduct or confront an assault. Leaning their body weight on their right legs with their left feet forward, these two coordinated soldiers appear successfully assimilated into the complex apparatus of the IDF through a well composed martial performance resonating docility and obedience. Neither of them acknowledges the camera directly nor do they smile. At first sight, this generates the fabricated notion of a disinterested performance, making the sitters look subordinate to martial law, as though the picture is nothing more than an unmotivated agency attesting to an innate unity between personal and national identities.

It is impossible to assert safely that this actually was their desire. What may support such an argument, however, is the sheer fact that here one looks at a picture that was not taken by an authorised professional photographer. Rather, as Ephraim recalls, a third fellow soldier captured this picture, using the camera belonging to the soldier on our right.<sup>9</sup> As I explained earlier, taking pictures by unauthorised photographers within the Israeli military environment is a practice officially forbidden. From my experience as an IDF soldier and photographer, conscripts do not commonly tend to abide by this restriction and, normally, even the "high ranks" would not reinforce it. Precisely because Ephraim and his friend used a private camera for the production of their shared portrait, and because it was produced informally, voluntarily and while off duty, I would suppose their decision to assume such a representative pose is telling. I presuppose so because their adherence to a representative performance while being captured informally and illegitimately suggests that it was indeed their aspiration to show off; to offer themselves to future observers as exemplary soldiers—necessary and essential.

Another aspect that emerges when examining some of the images under scrutiny is that every now and then they appear incoherent in terms of the components that they show, undermining the significance of

assumed poses, sometimes also proclaiming that the depicted scene lacks logic. In Fig. 6-12, for instance, while my father and his friend are reproduced pictorially as successful illustrations of valour, the sheer coincidence of their appearance by the inscription *mirpa'a* (Infirmary), seen on the white wall in the background, bears witness to their corporeal fragility and vulnerability as human beings. This inscription pierces the projected identity of the two soldiers, constituting the photograph as an arena within which the impression of invincible forcefulness collides with the fact of human vulnerability.

Furthermore, performing their military competence, on their own, within a deserted environment of a military camp, the soldiers appear in a situation that does not allow any narrative context of combat, or training exercise to emerge; none of the details given to the viewer makes sense of the assumed pose. The soldiers do not actually engage in any military activity. Thus, the whole scenario appears out of place. The exemplary soldierly performance, although perhaps succeeding as a means of conveying the soldiers' self-confidence, turns out to be an indication of their actual inactivity. They appear "ready to go", prepared to fight, yet redundant. Ironically, their endeavour to appear so representative and competent results in an image indicating that instead of actually performing their military duties, they took some time-out to "play soldiers", to strike poses for the camera.

### *Between the Family and the State: Varda Blum*

Another example of a somewhat grotesque portrayal brings me to the practice of family photography per se. It is a series of photographs introducing viewers to a soldier, Varda Blum, depicted within a domestic environment. The series includes four colour photographs, each one of them showing Varda performing, or assuming a different pose in the same private setting (Fig. 6-13 to 6-16). These were taken by Varda's father, Chaim Dluznovski, in the family's living room in 1969, when she returned home for a weekend for the first time since she had been assigned to her military unit.<sup>10</sup> The four photographs do something that we have not encountered yet: while all the pictures I have discussed so far bring the soldier back into the domestic sphere through the incorporation of their portraits into the family album, this series of photographs brings the soldier back home in literal terms.



Fig. 6-13: Chaim Dluznowski. 1969. *Untitled (Varda Blum)*. The Blum collection of family photographs, 1949-2006.

Fig. 6-14: Chaim Dluznowski. 1969. *Untitled (Varda Blum)*, The Blum collection of family photographs, 1949-2006.



Fig. 6-15: Chaim Dluznowski. 1969. *Untitled (Varda Blum and Guta Dluznovski)*. The Blum collection of family photographs, 1949-2006.

Fig. 6-16: Chaim Dluznowski. 1969. *Untitled (Varda Blum)*. The Blum collection of family photographs, 1949-2006.



A performance of military behaviour is not something one expects to encounter in a living room. However, Fig. 6-16 is compatible with the portrait of a child who at the beginning of this chapter saluted the camera in a different living room, about ten years earlier (Fig. 6-2). There, the child's pose was part of his enactment of the role *soldier*, exploiting perhaps the most obvious of military mannerisms to generate a convincing portrait. Here, however, the scenario appears absurd. It is not a portrait of one "testing out" a social position; it is not a portrait of one who is yet to be socialised. Rather, the portrayed subject actually occupies such a position, and is practically already a part of the social body she represents in the photograph. But, inasmuch as it is probably completely out of place, just like in the child's portrait, Varda's portrait also appears as a performance designed to produce family approval and pride.

The picture was constructed and taken within the familial environment and, as we are told, the photographer is the subject's father. The enactment of the pose is carried out in front of a family member and for the family. The scene it represents is of a daughter saluting her father; a daughter declaring her martial persona, her subjection to the nation state of Israel, being granted family approval to do so. Inasmuch as the scene itself is somewhat unreasonable and grotesque, it could be said that it manifests a quasi-ceremonial moment at which the subject's father reinforces his daughter's identity as occupying the position *soldier*. The production of the photograph is equivalent here to an investment of power. Varda steps back into her given place in the nuclear family; she is the girl-child and an emblem of family pride. Fig. 6-15 appears to support and reinforce this notion, as the subject's mother, Guta, joins the settings, standing by her daughter.

This series of photographs makes it clear that the return of the soldier back home is the reason for the photographic occasion. The one photograph where Guta enters the frame, thus, can be seen as if showing a mother wishing to appear with her soldier-daughter, as if to declare motherly pride, her connection to the soldier, as well as to maintain or reaffirm the latter's association with the family. Both the making of the portraits as well as the appearance of another family member within them indicate family support, approval and encouragement. At the same time though, they also manifest two separate systems of subjection: the Family and the State, once again demonstrating how even though the family photograph contributes to fixing, if not approving, the social position of the soldier, it also works as a reminder of the soldier's position within the family sphere in which they are perceived as individuals, unique and irreplaceable.

Bourdieu maintains that the family incorporates such portraits into the family album because of its desire to imbue itself with a higher social status, or at least in order to indicate its participation in social life (1990). I would argue, in order to achieve that, first the sitter must be recognised as a family member, an individual. In other words, if the family wishes to maintain the image of the soldier within its environment, it is only because it works to remind the family of the successful integration of *their* loved ones. Whilst in itself the possession of the image does not conflict with the military apparatus, the incorporation of the image into the family sphere does, as the image does not enter the family sphere without being “named”. It is only by possessing the sitter that the family members can claim their status as part of the social sphere surrounding them. And it is only because the family rejects the anonymity of the soldier that they enjoy what the image presumes to signify. In this respect, especially when family members appear in photographs along with the soldier, they untie, or at least loosen the bond of the soldier to the state. Wittingly or not, such photographs operate to reclaim the unique individual identity of the military subject. It is in this respect that such family photographs subvert the symbolic power of the state over the soldier.

Steve Edwards’ work may offer another, more historical perspective (2006). Referring to the nineteenth-century production of the *carte-de-visite*, Edwards argues that it was a “homely” form of portraiture: “It drew the portrait down from the sphere of world history and inserted it into everyday life.” (2006, 78) Elaborating upon this point, Edwards later explains that while the public display of painted portraits was a way to announce the wealth and power of the depicted subject, *carte-de-visite* portraits were primarily directed towards intimates. In this respect, they did not operate to pronounce authority to other social classes. Rather, they were prosaic reminders of individual success. I believe that what Edwards argues is that the democratisation of portraiture, coupled with its position in the private rather than public sphere, undermined the economy of portraiture as a formal signifier of social and historical agency. Bearing this in mind, family photo-portraits can be understood as an elaboration of *carte-de-visite* portraiture: they are commonly produced for the family viewer and, more importantly, to be collected by the family and to be displayed within the family sphere. The situation of the portrait within the private realm is of significance here because it implies that the portraits are not intended, and are even incapable of declaiming supremacy, but rather belong to the family group; in the family sphere they do not work as symbols of power, rather as agencies reaffirming and privileging family ties.

Geoffrey Batchen thinks of family photographs as objects that “preoccupy the home and the heart” (2001, 57). He addresses them as objects that the family manufacture and accumulate to be experienced not only by the eye, but also through touch; not only as indexes, but also as materials (Batchen 2004). For Batchen the representational space of the family photograph and that of the family album in particular is a space above anything else made to proclaim family attachment. In his view, the family photograph is also a fetishised object, making present those who for one reason or another are not present. And, once again, the fact that family photographs are produced for the family circle and that this is commonly the only sphere within which they are dispersed, appears to support Batchen’s assumption that family photographs operate to link family relations to one another and to indicate the strength of family ties over others.

If we agree with both Edwards and Batchen, then the familial accumulation of photographs of family men and women in uniform is indeed equal to symbolically resubjecting the soldier to his or her primeval family group. Of course they maintain the military symbols that render them legible as occupying the social position *soldier*, yet their subjection to the family sphere may also be apprehended as a reluctance of the latter to let them go. After all, in line with Batchen’s *material* thesis, the accumulation of family photographs enables the internalisation of worlds existing outside and beyond the family domain, worlds that consist of family members but that in themselves are not family orientated. Bringing those worlds into the family album is similar to negotiating a way to reunite the family and withstand the pressure for its dispersal.

## Posing Militarism in the Domestic Sphere

In his essay *Adolescent Socialization*, Ernest Campbell writes:

Adolescence is the period of tension and peace-making between the dependency of the past and the independence of the future, between demands placed on the actor by an expanding circle of influences and by an increasing awareness of self and need for identity. The period, like all other social roles, has its virtues and its liabilities. The assets of adolescence are those that organize around the facts of physical maturity, energy, strength, and lack of responsibility. The frustrations of adolescence are those that organize around the lack of responsibility and the definition that adolescents, being less than dependable, predictable, and responsible, cannot be trusted with full freedom and citizenship rights. (1969, 823)

The representational sphere of portraiture may serve young Israeli soldiers as a forum for experimentation with the new identity they are obliged to take up during the period of late adolescence. It may be the most immediate and convenient space in which the young soldier makes his or her new identity visible. It may also serve young soldiers to introduce their image while being decorated with state symbols of power, thus to indicate compliance with the ideological stance of the Israeli state as well as with the normative expectations of its majority Jewish society. Referring back to the recently quoted words of Campbell, it appears that photography provides a forum which enables the adolescent soldiers to imagine and introduce their successful passage into the world of adulthood, that is, to introduce themselves as independent yet compliant, mature as well as responsible and, perhaps above all, as loyal to their community, its norms and rules. It allows them to adumbrate an ideal subject position—one in which fractured identities may be reconciled.

But, do portrait photographs offer such homogenous views? Graham Clarke argues that “the portrait photograph is fraught with ambiguity” (1992, 4). His foundations for this statement lie in the fact that although photographs are commonly perceived in terms of verisimilitude, they do not provide a coherent identity for the sitter but only a visual representation of a moment captured by the camera. Furthermore, the portrait photograph exists within what Clarke names as a series of cultural codes through which viewers may be able to read meanings into the photograph, some of which are enigmatic, and others, paradoxical. The coexistence of the portrait photographs discussed in this chapter, within both the family sphere as well as within the broader environment of Israeli society, forms two domains that dictate, or at least influence the way one engages with them. Although the photographs are specific in terms of the subjects and the environments they show, their meaning remains unclear, ambiguous and, at times, contradictory.

The portrait of Adi Tamir maintains the formality and dignity of the genre of portraiture, but its purpose is not self-evident (Fig. 6-17). Taken in 1989, the portrait empties identity of much that is personal apart from Adi’s status as a representative of the IDF. The inscription of social position is privileged, leaving the individual anonymous. I explained at the beginning of this chapter that, as a soldier, the Israeli adolescent becomes a trustworthy member of society. Family photographs, thus, may satisfy representational anxiety. By this I mean that the production of such photographs and, in particular, their accumulation and presentation in the family domain secures the identity of family members as participants in Israeli social life as well as its protectors. They attest to the social rights to

which the family member is entitled due to their compliance with the expectations of the politically charged Israeli social environment. Put differently, commonly, military service consumes a period of two to three years at the end of which the Israeli returns to the civilian environment. As a civilian, there is nothing but photographs to link the citizen to their past military identity in a tangible manner.



Fig. 6-17: Photographer Unknown. 1989. *Untitled (Adi Tamir)*. The Tamir family album, 1989-1991.

While the putative transparency of the medium of photography enables one to view the family member as associated with militarism and thus also with state ideology, the sitter's self-construction reproduces them as necessary eccentric narcissistic figures: representational anxiety brings about a representational failure; a desire for exemplarity results in anti-heroism. Each one of the images discussed here marks out the sitter's

identity as special, unique and irreplaceable, so that, in fact, it works to signify what Israeli soldiery is not about, and what Israeli soldiers should not be doing. This attempt of individuals to inscribe their image as soldiers *independently* from the military authority quite often results in images incompatible with the IDF's ideological moral stance, sometimes even in images of a ridiculous nature. These subvert the otherwise satisfied notion of successful integration into the military sphere and the subject's mastery of soldiery.



Fig. 6-18: Photographer Unknown. 2001. *Untitled (Marganit Blum)*. The Blum collection of family photographs, 1949-2006.

The rather light-hearted portrait of Marganit Blum is a recent example attesting to the subversive character of family photographs (Fig. 6-18). The portrait was taken in Marganit's office in 2002 during her military service as an optician for the Ammunition Corps. Wearing the informal "B" IDF uniform, Marganit sits in front of the camera, having her photograph taken while her hair is held over her face by a pair of sunglasses. Family photography is often also about depicting friends and relations clowning themselves for the camera. Using Marganit's photograph as a rather exaggerated example, one can learn how while conforming to family photography's conventions, its comical character also functions to propagate an undignified image of soldiery.

Apart from unusual circumstances, if family photographs vacillate at all, it is commonly within the family sphere. For its mythic association with particular family relations and because of its status as a fetishised object—an indication of something lost as well as a protection against such loss—it is precisely within that sphere that the family photograph maintains a high potential to perpetuate notions of the socially normative through the reinforcement of familial ties, rendering all other ties symbolic and subservient. Yet, in the context of the IDF and Israeli state ideology, family photographs and the practice of family photography inevitably subvert the ideological image of Israeli soldiery. They mark a clash between the ideological foundations of vernacular family portraits and those underpinning the image of “ideal” Israeli soldiers. Vernacular family portraits negate that image, drawing attention to its ideological fabrication, and to the tensions inherent in persuading Israeli citizens to live up to the expectations of the state.

## Chapter Six

<sup>1</sup> On the symbolic meanings of military costume see, Arnold Toynbee (1969).

<sup>2</sup> Here I draw upon Roland Barthes' notion of the *that has been* which he identifies as one of the exclusive properties of analogue photography (1981).

<sup>3</sup> I claim so following Michael Gluzman's assertion (1997) that the Zionist movement has aspired to secure a "masculine future" to the Jewish people by the transformation of the Diasporic "old Jew" into a "new Jew"—a figure which would embody a clear opposition to the European image of the Jew as feminine.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of the IDF's uniforms see, Ze'ev Schiff and Eitan Haber (1976).

<sup>5</sup> Miriam (Miri) Tamir, conversation with the author, Petah Tiqueva, Israel, 24 April 2008.

<sup>6</sup> IDF General Staff Command 21.0210, Photographing in IDF Camps.

<sup>7</sup> It is conventionally argued in photography theory that the making of photographic auto/portraits is akin to actively fetishising one's self as a form of protection against one's loss. See, for example, Thierry de Duve (1978); Christian Metz (1985); Jay Ruby (1984); Susan Sontag (1977).

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion on the construction of identity in domestic photographs and the family album see, Marianne Hirsch (1997); Patricia Holland (2003).

<sup>9</sup> Ephraim Pasternak, conversation with the author, Ramat Gan, Israel, 1 October 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Varda Blum, conversation with the author, Givataim, Israel, 20 April, 2008.

## Chapter Seven

<sup>1</sup> This study addresses *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, inclusive of Sunday equivalent editions.

<sup>2</sup> The selected images appear in various media and across the tabloid/broadsheet divide: on the 25th March, Anecita Hudson's photo appears in the *Sun* (8), *Daily Mail* (8), *Independent* (9), *Guardian* (6), *Telegraph* (5) and *Times* (9).

<sup>3</sup> Nina Allsopp appears in the *Mirror* (1), *Sun* (10) and *Telegraph* (6) (29th and 30th March).

<sup>4</sup> Miriam Abdulhassan appears in the *Independent on Sunday* (8) and *Observer* (16) on 13th April, and *Times* (5) on 14th April, with a very similar photograph of another Iraqi girl in the *Sunday Telegraph* on the same day (13th April, 4).

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to trace the copyright holder for this particular image, despite enquiries to the original newspaper and photo agencies. See note (2) for date and page references in British newspaper editions.



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